

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1212
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY
AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY
AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY
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AMEMBASSY MANILA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 ISLAMABAD 4199

MANILA FOR AMBASSADOR BYROADE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, PK, US,
SUBJECT: THE MILITARY'S ROLE IN THE POLITICAL CONFRONTATION

SUMMARY: THE ARMY HOLDS THE KEY TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S FUTURE.
HE CAN BE REASONABLY CONFIDENT OF STAYING IN POWER AS LONG AS
THE MILITARY SUPPORTS HIM. HE IS DRAWING THE MILITARY CLOSER INTO
HIS POLITICAL WEB AND THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION IS INCREASING THAT
THE ARMY HAS DECIDED TO ACTIVELY SUPPORT THE PM.

WE BELIEVE THE MILITARY STILL DOES NOT WANT TO BECOME INVOLVED
IN WHAT IT SEES AS A POLITICAL CONFRONTATION AND HOPES A "CONSTIT-
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UTIONAL" SOLUTION CAN BE FOUND. THERE ARE VARIOUS OTHER REASONS
WHY THE ARMY HAS NOT MOVED TO OUST BHUTTO. THERE IS NO ONE
BVIOUS MILITARY OFFICER WHO COULD ASSUME NATIONAL LEADERSHIP
WITH ACTIVE ARMY SUPPORT. THE ARMY'S CONCERN WITH FINDING A
CONSTITUTIONAL SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS IS ALSO AN IMPEDIMENT TO
MOVEING AGAINST THE PM. BHUTTO IS NOT THE TYPE TO STEP ASIDE
AND FIND A CONSTITUTIONAL WAY TO ASK THE ARMY IN. THE MILITARY

ALSO FEARS THAT IF IT AGAIN ENTERS THE POLITICAL FRAY ITS REPUTATION, AS HAPPENED IN THE PAST, WILL SUFFER. ADDITIONALLY, SOME IN THE MILITARY OBVIOUSLY HOPE THAT WITH JUST SOME MORE TIME THE PM WILL FIND A WAY OUT OF THE DILEMMA - A LINE THAT BHUTTO HIMSELF MUST BE PUSHING. FINALLY THE MILITARY PROBABLY FINDS ITSELF OUTMANEUVERED BY BHUTTO ON THE POLITICAL STAGE, AS MOST OF THE OTHER ACTORS HAVE BEEN IN THE PAST.

AT THE SAME TIME, THERE ARE FORCES INFLUENCING THE ARMY TO MOVE QUICKLY. THEIR REPUTATION IS FALTERING BECAUSE THE ARMY IS ENFORCING MARTIAL LAW IN APPARENT SUPPORT OF THE PM. THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP MUST ALSO BE DISTURBED BY EVIDENCE OF INCREASING DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PM IN THE LOWER RANKS.

ON BALANCE, WE DO NOT SEE THE ARMY REMOVING BHUTTO FROM OFFICE IN THE PRESENT SECURITY SITUATION, AND THINK THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE ARMY MOVING AGAINST THE PM HAVE DIMINISHED IN THE PAST WEEK. IF BHUTTO DOES REMAIN IN POWER FOR SEVERAL MONTHS - IF NOT LONGER - ONE RESULT WILL BE, IN ADDITION TO THE DAMAGE ALREADY DONE TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN THE COUNTRY, THE GROWING POLITICIZATION OF THE ARMY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE ARMY HOLDS THE KEY TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S POLITICAL FUTURE. AS LONG AS IT SUPPORTS HIM, ENFORCES MARTIAL LAW, AND CONTAINS THE SECURITY SITUATION WHERE EVER AND WHEN EVER NEEDED, BHUTTO CAN BE REASONABLY CONFIDENT OF REMAINING IN POWER. THE ARMY DOES NOT WANT TO BE IN THIS SITUATION, AND IS UNDOUBTEDLY RATIONALIZING ITS PRESENT INTERVENTION BY ASSERTING THAT IT IS MERELY ACTING IN A CONSTITUTIONAL MANNER, IN SUPPORT OF ELECTED
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CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES, AND STILL REMAINS ABOVE THE POLITICAL FRAY. HOWEVER, BOTH LEADERSHIP AND MEN MUST REALIZE THAT THEY ARE SLOWLY BUT SURELY BECOMING MORE ENTANGLED IN BHUTTO'S POLITICAL WEB. HE IS DRAWING THEM CLOSER TO HIM AND HEIGHTENING THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION THAT THE ARMY HAS MADE AN ACTIVE CHOICE ON THE SIDE OF THE PM AND AGAINST THOSE OPPOSING HIM. SOME POLITICAL OBSERVERS HAVE EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT THE DEGREE OF SUPPORT THE MILITARY HAS GIVEN THE PRIME MINISTER. HOWEVER TO TAKE THIS VIEW IS BOTH TO UNDERESTIMATE THE MANIPULATIVE ABILITIES OF BHUTTO AND TO OVERESTIMATE THE POLITICAL SAGACITY AND RESOLUTENESS OF THE MILITARY.

2. WE BELIEVE THE MILITARY'S GOALS IN THE CRISIS HAVE NOT CHANGED. IT DOES NOT WANT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN POLITICS, FERVENTLY HOPES A "CONSTITUTIONAL" SOLUTION CAN BE FOUND, AND HAS NO PRESENT DESIRE TO ASSUME THE REINS OF POWER. YET EVEN THOUGH THIS MAY BE THE STRONGLY HELD VIEW IN THE ARMY, THE MILITARY HAS BECOME MORE DEEPLY INVOLVED IN THE POLITICAL EQUATION AND HAS ASSUMED GREATER POWERS. HOW THE MILITARY FOUND ITSELF IN THIS POSITION-AND HOW THE PRIME MINISTER ENCOURAGED THAT DEV-

ELOPMENT-PROVIDE INSIGHTS INTO THE MILITARY ROLE IN THE CON-
FRONTATION AND INDICATORS AS TO WHAT THE ARMY MAY DO IN THE
FUTURE.

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3. IN ADDITION TO AVOIDANCE OF POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY, THERE
ARE VARIOUS OTHER REASONS WHY THE ARMY HAS NOT YET MOVED TO
OUST THE PRIME MINISTER. ONE DIFFICULTY IS THAT EVEN IF THE
MILITARY WANTED TO MOVE, THERE IS NO OBVIOUS LEADER WHO COULD
ASSUME NATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITH THE ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE
ARMY. ALTHOUGH ON PAPER GENERAL MOHAMMAD SHARIFF AS
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE MAY SEEM A
REASONABLE CHOICE, AND IS THE SENIOR MOST GENERAL IN THE ARMY,
ONE CANNOT READILY ASSUME HE WOULD BE TAPPED. THE INDIVIDUAL
SERVICE CHIEFS IN PAKISTAN REPORT DIRECTLY TO THE PRIME
MINISTER, NEITHER TO NOR THROUGH THE CHAIRMAN. THE CHAIRMAN
MERELY "COORDINATES" THE JOINT CHIEFS MEETINGS, HE DOES NOT
CONTROL ANY DIVISIONS.
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4. THE LOGICAL AND TRADITIONAL CHOICE IS THE CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF. GENERAL ZIA-UL-HAQ IS A BRIGHT, AGGRESSIVE AND COMPETENT SOLDIER; HOWEVER HE IS SEEN AS BHUTTO'S MAN. SEVERAL LIEUTENANT GENERALS WERE PASSED OVER WHEN BHUTTO MADE ZIA COAS, AND SOME IN THE MILITARY BELIEVE THAT ZIA IS SO OBLIGATED TO THE PM HE IS TOO TAINTED TO BE AN ACCEPTABLE LEADER OF A MILITARY GOVERNMENT. THIS MIGHT CERTAINLY CHANGE ONCE AND IF THE ARMY IS FACED WITH THE DECISION OF WHOM TO PLACE IN CHARGE. UNTIL THEN, THE LACK OF A LOGICAL SUCCESSOR MUST GIVE PAUSE TO THOSE IN THE MILITARY WHO THINK ABOUT AN ARMY TAKEOVER. TWO HIGHLY RESPECTED MEN IN THE MILITARY WITH ADEQUATE RANK TO FILL THAT ROLE ARE GENERAL MOHAMMAD IQBAL - CORPS COMMANDER IN LAHORE, AND GENERAL JEHANZEB ARBAB - CORPS COMMANDER IN KARACHI. BOTH, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN PLACED IN CHARGE OF THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATIONS IN THEIR AREAS, THEREBY COLORING THEM TO SOME DEGREE WITH THE BHUTTO BRUSH. ALSO, THE TRADITIONS AND DISCIPLINE OF THE PAKISTAN ARMY RUN COUNTER TO CORPS COMMANDERS PUSHING ASIDE THE COAS IN A BID FOR POWER.

5. THE ARMY'S CONCERN WITH CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL PROCEDURES IS ALSO AN IMPEDIMENT TO A MOVE AGAINST THE PM. WE HAVE OFTEN BEEN TOLD BY RANKING MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY THAT THEIR PRIMARY INTEREST IS IN A "CONSTITUTIONAL" SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS. WHEN THEY DID MOVE IN THE PAST, BOTH IN 1958 AND 1969, THEY DID SO AT THE REQUEST AND INVITATION OF THE LEGALLY CONSTITUTED AUTHORITY AT THE TIME, ISKANDER MIRZA AS PRESIDENT IN '58 AND AYUB AS PRESIDENT IN 1969. TO ESTABLISH A PARALLEL NOW WOULD REQUIRE BHUTTO ASKING THE MILITARY TO TAKE OVER. WE SEE THIS AS VERY UNLIKELY. BHUTTO IS NOT THE TYPE, WHILE HE HAS OTHER OPTIONS, TO STEP ASIDE GRACIOUSLY FOR THE GOOD OF THE NATION AND INVITE THE ARMY TO COME IN.

6. THE ARMY WOULD ALSO PREFER TO AVOID POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT FOR, AS REPORTED FORMERLY, IT REALIZES THAT AS A RESULT OF ITS
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LAST FORAY INTO RUNNING THE COUNTRY ITS REPUTATION GREATLY SUFFERED AND ITS ESTEEM IN THE PUBLIC EYE WAS CONSIDERABLY LOWERED. THE ARMY WILL TAKE EVERY STEP IT CAN TO AVOID THE PUBLIC OPPROBRIUM IT FEARS WOULD BE THE EVENTUAL RESULT OF A RENEWED MILITARY RULE IN PAKISTAN. THE IRONY AND DILEMMA FOR THE ARMY IS THAT BY ENFORCING MARTIAL LAW IN THE THREE CITIES WHERE IT IS NOW IMPOSED, IT IS GENERATING THAT VERY CRITICISM

IT SEEKS SO STRENUOUSLY TO AVOID. ALTHOUGH THE MILITARY IS TAKING MEASURES IN THE MARTIAL LAW AREAS TO BENEFIT TO POPULATION (E.G. LOWERING OFFD PRICES AND CLEANING THE BUSES) AND SMALL SHOPKEEPERS MAY BE PLEASED AT THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING ABLE TO REOPEN THEIR BUSINESSES AS THE SECURITY SITUATION STABLIIZES, SUCH STEPS ARE UNLIKELY TO OUTWEIGH THE CRITICISM OF THE MILITARY FOR SUPPORTING THE PM.

7. THE MILITARY ALSO OBVIOUSLY HOPES THAT GIVEN ENOUGH TIME THE SITUATION WILL SOMEHOW RESOLVE ITSELF WITHOUT FURTHER MILITARY INTERVENTION. THIS HOPE IS UNDOUBTEDLY FED BY THE PRIME MINISTER WHO IS PROBABLY TELLING THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP THAT IF THEY CAN JUST GIVE HIM THE NECESSARY BREATHING SPACE HE WILL BE ABLE TO ARRANGE THE POLITICAL SETTLEMENT THE MILITARY WANTS AND THE NATION NEEDS. THIS IS A SEDUCTIVE COURSE FOR THE ARMY TO FOLLOW. IT ENABLES THEM TO BELIEVE THEY CAN POSTPONE THE DECISION WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE PM FOR A LITTLE LONGER. IN REALITY, HOWEVER, THE LONGER THEY SUPPORT THE PM BY ENFORCING MARTIAL LAW, THE GREATER THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION THAT THEY HAVE ALREADY MADE THAT FINAL DECISION. ALSO, BHUTTO CANNOT, BY HIMSELF, ACHIEVE A POLITICAL RESOLUTION OF THE CRISIS. THE KEY TO ANY POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IS OPPOSITION AGREEMENT AND BHUTTO HAS NO WAY OF GUARANTEEING THE OPPOSITION IMPRIMATUR ON A SETTLEMENT.

8. FINALLY, THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN ETHNIC TRAITS, AS MOST PAKISTANIS DO, WILL POINT TO THE FACT THAT THE ARMY IS ALMOST ENTIRELY PUNJABI, AND THAT PUNJABIS HAVE THE WORST RECORD OF MAKING SOUND POLITICAL DECISIONS OR OF GIVING THE NATION STRONG

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POLITICAL LEADERSHIP. THE IMAGE OF THE AFFABLE PUNJABI DUPED BY THE WILY SINDHI COMES TO MANY MINDS WHEN THE ARMY ATTEMPTS TO DEAL WITH BHUTTO IN A HIGH STAKES POLITICAL GAME. AS ALL ACTORS ON THE PAKISTAN POLITICAL STAGE KNOW - AND AS THE ARMY AS THE NEWEST THESPIAN IS RAPIDLY LEARNING - BHUTTO CAN BE THE MOST PERSUASIVE AND RATIONAL OF MEN WHEN EXPLAINING WHY HIS COURSE SHOULD BE SUPPORTED. WHAT BHUTTO PROBABLY HOPES IS THAT THE ARMY WILL SOON FIND THAT THE STAKES ARE SO HIGH THAT IT WILL EITHER BE UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO GET OUT OF THE PM'S GAME AND CHANGE SIDES.

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9. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY REASONS WHY THE ARMY HAS BEEN AND WILL REMAIN HESITANT TO MOVE AGAINST THE PM, THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS AS WELL FORCING THE SIDE OF A QUICK DECISION. AS NOTED ABOVE, THERE IS GROWING PUBLIC ANIMOSITY TOWARD THE MILITARY BECAUSE OF WHAT IS PERCEIVED AS ITS DECISION TO SUPPORT ACTIVELY THE PRIME MINISTER. THE DAY BEFORE MARTIAL LAW WAS INTRODUCED, SOLDIERS WERE GARLANDED WITH FLOWERS IN KARACHI. THE DAY AFTER, ROCKS WERE THROWN AT THEM. DURING THE PAST WEEK, WOMEN IN PNA-SPONSORED PROCESSION HAVE TAUNTED THE SOLDIERS - USING COLORFUL AND PEJORATIVE LANGUAGE SO SKILLFULLY AND IMAGINATIVELY EMPLOYED BY THE PUNJABIS -
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ACCUSING THEM OF BEING POLLUTED BY THEIR SUPPORT FOR BHUTTO. AFTER WORKING SO DILIGENTLY AND CAREFULLY TO REGAIN SOME OF THE RESPECT AND ESTEEM THE MILITARY HAD BEFORE THE FALL OF AYUB, THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP MUST BE DISHEARTENED AND DISPIRITED BY THE FROWING WAVE OF POPULAR ANTAGONISM TOWARD THE ARMY.

10. FOR THOSE IN THE MILITARY WHO TRY TO LOOK BEYOND THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS AND SEE WHAT THEIR ROLE WOULD BE IN A PAKISTAN RULED BY THE PRIME MINISTER IN ANOTHER YEAR, THE PROSPECT IS BLEAK AND DISCOURAGING. A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY IS A NATION WITH A SULLEN POPULATION, A PRIME MINISTER WITHOUT A POPULAR MANDATE OR LEGITIMACY, PROPPED UP BY THE ARMY. THAT VISION STRENGTHENS THE VIEW OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE THE MILITARY CANNOT LONG DELAY A MOVE AGAINST THE PM IF A POLITICAL SOLUTION IS NOT IMMEDIATELY FOUND.

11. THE LEADERS OF THE ARMY ALSO KNOW THAT THE POLITICAL SPLIT IN THE NATION IS REFLECTED IN THE MILITARY AS WELL. WE UNDERSTAND THAT ESPECIALLY IN THE LOWER OFFICER RANKS, THERE IS INCREASING DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND WITH THE ARMY'S SUPPORT FOR HIM. IF THE NATIONAL CONFRONTATION CONTINUES AND ANTAGONISMS CONTINUE TO GROW, THE DIVISIVE TENDENCIES IN THE ARMY CAN ONLY INCREASE AS WELL. ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT BELIEVE THIS WILL LEAD TO A QADAFFI EMERGIN FROM THE MIDDLE RANKS -- THE PAKISTAN ARMY IS STILL TOO DEDICATED, DISCIPLINED AND TRADITIONAL FOR THAT -- SUCH TENDENCIES ARE DESTRUCTIVE OF ARMY MORALE AND CAN ONLY ADVERSELY AFFECT ITS MILITARY ABILITIES, TO THE CONSTERNATION AND DESPAIR OF THE SENIOR OFFICER CORPS.

12. THE ARMY IS NOT MERELY BEING PASSIVELY LED ACROSS THE POLITICAL STAGE BY BHUTTO, HOWEVER WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE MILITARY IS TELLING BOTH SIDES IN THE CONFRONTATION THAT THEY SHOULD SIT DOWN AND TALK AND THAT THE ARMY WANTS TO SEE A POLITICALLY NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. THE ARMY MAY WELL BE CONFIDENTIAL

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TELLING THE PM THAT THEIR SUPPORT IS AT LEAST PARTIALLY DEPENDENT ON EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE JUST SUCH A SOLUTION. IN RESPONSE THE PRIME MINISTER CAN SAY, AND PROBABLY DOES, THAT HIS WILLINGNESS TO TALK WITH THE OPPOSITION IS WELL KNOWN AND DOCUMENTED. THE STUMBLING BLOCK IS THE OPPOSITION'S UNWILLINGNESS TO MEET WITH HIM.

13. WITH THE PRESENT SECURITY SITUATION, WE DO NOT SEE THE ARMY TAKING STEPS TO REMOVE BHUTTO FROM OFFICE. THEY WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT HIM AND CONSEQUENTLY BECOME MORE ENTANGLED IN HIS POLITICAL TENDRILS. WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT THEY WOULD ONLY MOVE AGAINST THE PM IN EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES. AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CRISIS WE FELT THAT IF THE NATION WERE BURNING, THE ARMY WOULD THEN THROW BHUTTO OUT AND COME TO POWER TO SAVE THE COUNTRY. WE AND OTHER POLITICAL OBSERVERS ARE NOW THINKING SERIOUSLY ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT IF THE NATION WERE BURNING, RATHER THAN DEPOSE THE PM THE ARMY MIGHT HELP HIM PUT OUT THE FIRE. CREEPING MARTIAL LAW AND LONGER AND MORE STRINGENT CURFEWS WITH ACTIVE ARMY SUPPORT ARE CERTAINLY POSSIBLE.

SHORT OF THE NEED TO IMPOSE NATION-WIDE MARTIAL LAW COUPLED WITH A COMPLETE BREAKDOWN IN THE ECONOMY, WE BELIEVE THE ONLY OTHER LIKELY SCENARIO UNDER WHICH THE ARMY WOULD TAKE OVER WOULD BE MASSIVE AND VIOLENT CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE. IF THOUSANDS OF PUNJABIS TOMORROW MARCHED IN LAHORE DURING THE CURFEW AND WERE WILLING TO DEFY MARTIAL LAW REGULATIONS - WITH ALL THE RESULTS THAT MIGHT ENSUE - THE MILITARY WOULD BE FORCED TO THEN MAKE THAT ULTIMATE DECISION WE HAVE REFERRED TO BEFORE - WHETHER OR NOT TO ORDER PUNJABI SOLDIERS TO SHOOT PUNJABI CIVILIANS TO KEEP BHUTTO IN POWER. SHOR OF THAT, WE THINK THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE ARMY MOVING AGAINST THE PM HAVE DIMINISHED RATHER THAN INCREASED IN THE PAST WEEK.

14. EVEN WITHOUT A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, LACKING A MASS DEFIANCE OF MARTIAL LAW AND CURFEWS, IT IS CERTAINLY POSSIBLE TO FORESEE BHUTTO STILL IN POWER IN SEVERAL MONTHS IF NOT LONGER. ONE OF THE VICTIMS OF SUCH AN UNSTABLE SITUATION
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WOULD BE THE MILITARY. THE POTENTIAL HARM DONE TO THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND NASCENT DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN PAKISTAN AS A RESULT OF RECENT EVENTS IS EVIDENT. HOWEVER, THE MILITARY COMPARED TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN PAKISTAN HAS BEEN RELATIVELY INCORRUPTIBLE, EFFICIENT AND RESPECTED. THAT STANDING WAS SEVERELY SHAKEN IN THE LATE 60S AND EARLY 70S. IF A SATISFACTORY ANSWER TO THE PRESENT CONFRONTATION IS NOT FOUND SOON, THE ONE INSTITUTION WHICH MORE THAN ANY OTHER HAS RESISTED POLITICIZATION DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS COULD FIND ITSELF ONCE AGAIN WITH A SULLIED REPUTATION AND MISTRUSTED BY THE PEOPLE.
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